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SUBJECT: LUXEMBOURG: DISPATCHES FROM THE DUCHY-OCTOBER 2009

LUXEMBOURG 00000313 001.2 OF 003

11. (U) Embassy Luxembourg is pleased to present the October 2009 edition of "Dispatches from the Duchy" to capture highlights from the local press, diplomatic and international communities, and news not otherwise reported during the month. Prepared by (acting) POL/ECON Chief Adam Center. This month's topics include:

- spouses of "Cuba 5" visit MFA;
- dairy farmers protest EU Agriculture Ministerial;
- Luxembourg candidate for the European Central Bank;
- Luxembourg Green Party unhappy with H1N1 progress;
- Press freedom conference in Luxembourg;
- shenanigans at Villeroy & Boch;
- further shenanigans on the tennis court.

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"CUBA 5" SPOUSES COME TO LUXEMBOURG  
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12. (SBU) Wives of two of the famed "Cuba 5" prisoners confined in Florida visited Luxembourg in mid-October. Olga Salanueva and Adriana Perez, wives of Rene Gonzalez and Gerardo Hernandez, respectively, met with MFA representatives and parliamentarians during their brief visit to the Grand Duchy. The two women traveled to other countries in the region as well, spreading the gospel about their husbands' plight. Luxembourg officials tend toward reticence on most issues related to Cuba, as the Grand Duchess, Maria Teresa, is a native Cuban. Any conversation linking Luxembourg and Cuba tends to default into speculation of what role the Grand Duchess may or may not play, even as the Palace purports to be above political dialogue. The fact that the MFA granted an audience to Senoras Salanueva and Perez therefore raises eyebrows. MFA's Latin America coordinator told Poloff that the women lamented the baseless denial of visas to them to visit their husbands and reaffirmed the readiness of the Cuban government to directly negotiate the case of the "Cuba 5" with U.S. authorities. Reports of the visit were noticeably absent from Luxembourg press. Post picked up on the story purely by chance as a Google alert on the word "Luxembourg" returned the story from a Cuban press outlet.

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MILK DOES DO A BODY GOOD - TO THE TUNE OF 280 MILLION EUROS  
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13. (U) Dairy farmers besieged the site of European Union Agricultural Ministers meetings on 19 October, causing minor, but expected, paralysis of Luxembourg's traffic pattern for hours. The protests were planned well in advance and Luxembourg police amply prepared to manage the situation. Official figures indicate that more than 2000 farmers and nearly 500 tractors picketed the meeting site. The well-organized protesters ignited bundles of straw, tires, and even a felled tree, but caused minimal damage. Press reports indicated, as well, the hurling of several Molotov cocktails, but no injuries were reported. During the course of meetings, the European Commission acknowledged the

farmers' concerns, proposing a 280 million euro fund to ease the dairy sector's troubles. EU Agriculture Commission representative Mariann Fischer Boel commented that the protests have followed the agriculture ministers all over the continent in recent months, and she was "emptying" EU pockets for other agricultural sectors that may encounter troubles of their own in the future. Fischer Boel indicated that, for 21 of the 27 EU governments, securing this aid for the dairy sector was a priority.

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EUROPEAN CENTRAL BANK VICE PRESIDENT  
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¶4. (U) The government of Luxembourg nominated its central bank governor, Yves Mersch, to succeed Greek incumbent Lucas Papademos as Vice President of the European Central Bank. Reuters quotes Prime Minister Juncker as saying Mersch would make an excellent candidate and that he would do all in his power to ensure Mersch ascends to the VP position. PolAsst, however, was present at the Juncker press brief and indicated Reuters did not accurately report Juncker's comments. Juncker did endorse Mersch's candidacy, but the endorsement was tepid - Juncker and Mersch are known to harbor a dislike of each other. PolAsst reported that Juncker made no such emphatic statements and certainly made no assertion that he would "do everything within (his) possibilities so that Mersch can become vice president of the ECB," as the Reuters story reports. Mersch has served as Luxembourg's central bank director since 1998.

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H1N1 UPDATE: GREENS QUESTION LACK OF INFORMATION  
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LUXEMBOURG 00000313 002.2 OF 003

¶5. (U) Luxembourg's Green Party criticized the Government of Luxembourg for lack of transparency in its efforts to address the H1N1 flu spread in the Grand Duchy. Party leader Jean Huss held a press conference on 26 October, during which he accused the government of withholding information about side effects from the H1N1 vaccine. The GOL has announced that it will open sites around the country to administer the vaccine, and that there will be more than adequate reserves to meet the needs of the entire country. The Greens also suggested that those who the government dispatches to administer the vaccine may not be properly trained and informed about the medication or its potential side effects.

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FREEDOM OF THE PRESS ROUNDTABLE  
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¶6. (U) The Luxembourg Chamber of Deputies spearheaded a project which brought a media freedom and protection of journalists' sources conference to Luxembourg, held 26 October. The conference was organized by the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) Subcommittee for Media, and the GOL parliamentarians successfully lobbied for it to take place in the Grand Duchy. European journalists and media-related NGOs participated in the roundtable, alongside members of the CoE's Parliamentary Assembly. Presided over by former UK Minister for Media and Heritage Andrew McIntosh and former BBC senior correspondent William Horsley, the PACE subcommittee presented a country-by-country report indicating the Council of Europe has suffered a "marked setback" in the overall level of press freedom in the past three years, citing a minimum of twenty journalist murders, apparently linked to their work, since 2007, a huge increase over the previous three year period. McIntosh labeled the lack of media freedom in Europe as a "running sore" which will not go away.

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"BOSS-NAPPING" AT VILLEROY & BOCH  
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¶7. (U) Disgruntled staff at historic and internationally-renowned household goods furnisher Villeroy & Boch held the company's Luxembourg plant director, Charles-Antoine de Theux, hostage for several hours on 21 October. While there was no dramatic denouement to the situation (the police waited patiently outside; what was reported as "hours" of heavy drama appears to have really only been minutes), the incident is symbolic of dissent among the ranks. The V&B house is a Luxembourg institution and, for many, is the country's pride and joy. Yet the company will shutter its Luxembourg operations in June 2010, eliminating hundreds of jobs. One German news outlet ran a story on 24 October lamenting the spread of "boss-napping" to Luxembourg, claiming that German far left political parties are calling for use of this tactic in industrial disputes in that country.

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LUXEMBOURG AT CENTRE COURT  
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¶8. (U) The Grand Duchy played host this month to the professional Women's Tennis Association (WTA) tour's annual Luxembourg Open. The tournament lacks the cachet of major international stars such as the Williams sisters, but this year boasted both the U.S. Open champ, Belgian Kim Clijsters, and runner-up, Dane Caroline Wozniacki. The tourney was eventually won by the Swiss Timea Bacsinsky, but controversy swirled from day one following Wozniacki's untimely withdrawal. Ahead 7-5, 5-0 and one game away from victory, Wozniacki - the number six ranked woman in the world - withdrew, citing an injury, giving the victory to her opponent, Luxembourg native Anne Kremer. Courtside microphones picked up on the player's father advising her to retire before winning the match, sparking a major swing in betting parlors to her opponent and igniting speculation of a fix. Wozniacki continues to deny any wrongdoing, citing a leg injury and saying that she knew she would not be able to perform in the second round and chose "the sporting option" to allow her opponent that opportunity. She remains under WTA investigation for possible match-fixing and unsports(wo-)manlike conduct.

¶9. (U) Luxembourg struggles to make international sports headlines. Unheralded pro Gilles Muller made a surprise run to the quarterfinals of the 2008 U.S. Open, including a defeat of the highest-ranked American player, Andy Roddick. The famed Schleck brothers - Andy and Frank - pedaled their way to top five finishes in this year's Tour de France (NOTE: Foreign Minister Jean Asselborn is a noted cycling enthusiast and often shares this past-time with fellow minister, Frank-walter Steinmeier, the German Foreign

LUXEMBOURG 00000313 003.2 OF 003

Minister.). However, Luxembourg's sports headlines tend to skew toward the negative. The national soccer team has won only one international match in the last dozen years (sorry, Belarus). The annual Luxembourg Open will now be remembered not for a display of extraordinary tennis, but rather for being at the center of gambling controversy.

¶10. (U) Stay tuned for another exciting edition of Dispatches From the Duchy, coming soon to a WEBGRAM near you.

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